

# **A Chance to Squash the Maryland Gerrymander**

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Last fall, Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley (D) and the General Assembly redrew congressional districts for the state, which the Constitution requires every 10 years. These leaders produced an egregious gerrymander, one far more contorted than the notorious 1812 Massachusetts map for which the word gerrymandering was coined. District 3, only the worst of several bizarre districts, looks like blood spatter from a crime scene, ridiculously comprising the far-flung communities of Annapolis, Towson and parts of Silver Spring, while excluding most communities between.

Fortunately, this gerrymander can still be stopped. Democrats and Republicans opposed to the new map gathered enough petition signatures to give Marylanders the opportunity to repeal it in November. All they have to do is vote against Ballot Question 5 on Election Day. Rejection wouldn't affect this year's congressional results, but it would require the governor and General Assembly to, at the very least, redraw the congressional districts for the 2014 elections. Even better, it could finally lead to the creation of an independent commission system that would remove politics from the process once and for all.

It's important to note that the Maryland gerrymander wasn't just aimed at replacing Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-Frederick) with a Democrat in District 6, though that certainly was a primary goal. It was also intended by would-be kingmakers in Annapolis to favor certain Democrats.

In District 4, Rep. Donna Edwards (D-Prince George's) lost all of her constituents in Democrat-laden, campaign-donor-rich Montgomery County, with Rep. John Sarbanes (D-Baltimore County) gaining most of them in sprawling District 3. This change gives Sarbanes an advantage over Edwards and Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Montgomery) — who lost many of his Montgomery County constituents, replaced by those in areas along the Pennsylvania border — in several respects, including in a future U.S. Senate primary. Treated as pawns, a majority of Montgomery County residents, and many in neighboring counties, too, were moved into different congressional districts. Most were moved for purely political reasons.

There is broad opposition to this gerrymander. When it was proposed last fall, it was blasted by Common Cause of Maryland, the League of Women Voters, civil rights groups, state legislators of both parties, a supermajority of the Montgomery County Council and editorial boards across the state. In April, state Senate Majority Leader Rob Garagiola (D-Montgomery) — the candidate in the Democratic primary for the District 6 congressional seat who was clearly the intended beneficiary of the anti-Bartlett gerrymander — was overwhelmingly rejected by the voters. In July, the State Board of Elections certified that more than 59,000 voters had signed the referendum petition on the gerrymander and placed it on the November ballot. In August, the Ballot Questions

Advisory Committee of the Montgomery County Democratic Party voted 11 to 1 (with two abstentions) against the redistricting map. Then, on Wednesday, Montgomery's Democratic precinct officials defeated a motion to support the gerrymander, and the county party officially adopted "no position" on the ballot question — despite being lobbied to support the map by O'Malley, the state Democratic party chair, House Democratic whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) and the county's most powerful lawmakers in Annapolis.

Since it's in the nature of political parties to gerrymander whenever they can, and as blatantly as they can get away with, Maryland needs to establish an independent redistricting commission, as several states have. This would be a steep uphill climb in Annapolis, but the extreme gerrymander imposed by the governor and the General Assembly creates an opening for those who support fair and rational congressional districts. What's needed now is the message that would be sent by a resounding no vote on Question 5.

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